

Redefining the Dream: Creating a More Sustainable American Dream

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carla Earhart". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Carla" and last name "Earhart" clearly legible.

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

May, 2012

Expected Date of Graduation

May, 2012

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Abstract

The American Dream in terms of housing has been promoted through the standard of single-family homeownership. However, the current model of the American Dream creates various social, economic, and environmental problems. The *Redefining the Dream* is an immersive learning project that was created as a response to the recent housing crisis. *Redefining the Dream* seeks to analyze children's perceptions on housing and provide educational tools that will allow America's future housing consumers to understand a variety of housing structures and tenure statuses. By understanding problems with the current model of the American Dream being promoted, the American Dream can be expanded and can satisfy Americans' housing needs and wants without eradicating the American Dream.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Carla Earhart for advising me throughout this project and for leading the *Redefining the Dream* project. Without her guidance creating and leading *Redefining the Dream*, this thesis project would not be possible. Her support will help far beyond *Redefining the Dream*, my thesis project, and my college career.

I would also like to thank every other member of *Redefining the Dream*- Erin Anderson, Ivana Armstrong, Joey Buschur, Megan Bloom, Carolyn Case, John Kiefer, Katie Morris, Sara Novak, Julia Sherck, Kristina Smith, Emily Westermeier, Andy Ward, and Eliza Ward who have provided ideas and information that have made *Redefining the Dream* and my thesis project possible.

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The American Dream

The American Dream is essentially based on the principles of freedom and liberty that allow Americans to pursue their dreams through hard work in order to achieve success. According to James Truslow Adams in *The Epic of America*, the American Dream is “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement... It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of fortuitous circumstances or birth position” (Adams, 1938, pg. 415).

The American Dream can mean many different things to many different people. Family and basic human needs like shelter have understandably made housing one of the most important parts of American life and the American Dream. Perhaps the most iconic goal of the American Dream in historic and contemporary context is single-family homeownership. The dream of homeownership has been ingrained into many Americans’ minds through the media, popular culture, and legislature. However, there are many social, environmental, and economic problems with the current model of this American Dream in regards to housing and it deserves to be reexamined.

Purpose: *Redefining the Dream*

As a response to changing housing needs, economic conditions, and perceptions the “*Redefining the Dream*” project was created by Ball State faculty member Carla Earhart as a way to reexamine the American Dream. Due to the recent housing crisis, she proposed the *Redefining the Dream* project be done at the Virginia Ball Center for Creative Inquiry. The purpose of the Virginia Ball Center is to provide a place for creative academic projects and immersive learning for Ball State students. Starting the spring semester of 2012 fourteen students, including myself, and Carla Earhart, our faculty leader, began work on the *Redefining the Dream* project at the Virginia Ball Center (“Virginia B. Ball,” n.d.).

At the beginning of the semester, our group came together to further focus our goal as a team. We decided the purpose of *Redefining the Dream* was to reevaluate the American Dream in relation to housing. In order to achieve our goal, we sought to promote a broader array of appropriate housing options and eliminate the negative connotations that come with certain structural types and tenure statuses. We wanted to show that there is more to the American Dream than single-family home ownership. We wished that in the future Americans will be able to choose which housing option best meets their individual wants, needs, and resources in order to fulfill their American Dream.

In order to achieve these goals our team began creating a documentary, website, and showcase to raise awareness and provide educational tools. One of the main focuses of the project was to investigate how children perceive

housing options and then provide materials for children to educate them about housing. The ages of four to eight were chosen as key developmental ages in which children create perceptions they keep with them the rest of their lives. By targeting this age group, we sought to capture the people who will make up the housing future of America.

In order to fulfill these goals, Documentary, Website, Research, and Operations teams were created. Throughout the project I worked mostly with the website and research team, but also did some work for the operations and documentary teams. The documentary team interviewed housing professionals, early childhood educators, and children, as well as interacted and played with children. By interviewing kids they were able to find the key housing concepts children can grasp and understand, and what perceptions they receive from their families and the media. The final product created by the documentary team is a short documentary of their findings that will be distributed through various sources. The documentary titled *Somewhere Called Home* was created as an educational tool to bring awareness to the issues of housing and bring acceptance of a variety of housing types.

The research team, including myself, analyzed various popular books, movies, and television shows to find what housing messages are given in various media consumed by children. The research team evaluated whether these messages about housing options are negative or positive and if they are fair. The purpose of this research was to determine what media is appropriate for children in order to provide recommendations on learning products on

housing for families and educators. The website was created to provide suggested lesson plans and activities to teach children. In addition to this, our entire project team had a showcase on May 1st, 2012 to display our website, documentary, educational resources, and various other findings.

I created this thesis paper as an individual project in order to further develop the group *Redefining the Dream* project. The purpose of this thesis is to incorporate findings from the group project with my own research to show how to the American Dream has been promoted, its various problems, and how things can change with the help of *Redefining the Dream*. In addition to educating people, I wish to show how promoting more urban housing can be a sustainable option for the health of people and communities as opposed to only promoting single-family style housing. By creating awareness and providing education the American Dream can live on for future generations using a variety of tenure and housing types.

How the American Dream has been Promoted

In order to better understand the various social, economic, and environmental problems of the version of the American Dream currently being endorsed, it is essential to understand how this dream has been promoted throughout history. The American Dream is deeply engrained in American culture, policy, media, and the mind of Americans. Although the American Dream is different for every person, I will be referring to the American Dream in terms of housing and the typical promotion of single-family home ownership. Beyond housing structures, I will be referring to other issues relating to housing

such as family, community, environment, policy, economic structures, and much more.

Single-family housing has been promoted throughout American history for various reasons. In the book *Chasing the American Dream*, William Rohe and Harry Watson state, “The value of homeownership is deeply ingrained in American public culture. From early laws requiring landownership for the right to vote, to nineteenth-century homestead legislation, to contemporary real estate brochures, the ownership of a home has long been presented as a crucial part of the ‘stake in society’” (Rohe & Watson, 2007, pg. vii). Beyond putting stake into an individual plot of land and housing structure, purchasing a home was seen to be putting stake into the entire community and country as a whole. Owning a home has been a crucial step for most Americans to invest in their community and fulfill their American Dream (Rohe & Watson, 2007).

According to Rohe and Watson, homeownership offers various social benefits for communities and families. Studies have shown that homeownership can create more stable communities with less crime, more civil participation, and increase overall quality of life. In order to continue to promote healthy communities, the American Dream has been promoted through the physical design of cities and through various social and economic legislations. Legislation has focused on providing decent, safe, and affordable housing for all economic classes. This legislation includes various homeownership programs and housing vouchers through the Federal Housing Administration and federal Public Housing Program. Some of these policies have been successful at

providing safe and affordable housing, while others have failed. (Rohe & Watson, 2007)

In addition to the government and media, “advocating the expansion of homeownership opportunities is also popular among realtors, homebuilders, and mortgage lenders and insurers, who are large contributors to political campaigns” (Rohe & Watson, 2007, pg.3). The list of federal legislation and programs promoting homeownership is almost endless. The Homestead Act of 1862 was one of the first pieces of legislations and offered free federal land to anyone who would make improvements to the land. The next important legislation was the National Housing Act of 1938, which created the Federal Housing Administration to spur lending. Ever since, the government has focused on expanding homeownership to more people, especially minorities (Rohe & Watson, 2007). On the next two pages is a timeline of important legislation from 1918 through 1997.

Table 4.1. Timeline of Major Homeownership Policies, 1918 to 1997

Year	Policy	Original Basis of Legislation
1918	"Own Your Own Home Campaign"	Project of the Commerce Department to engage over 7,000 civic partnerships called "Better Homes Committees," to promote homeownership
1932	Federal Home Loan Bank System	To shore up failing savings and loans and mutual savings institutions in the Depression by providing liquidity across regions
1934	Federal Housing Administration (FHA)	To stimulate the construction industry by building homes and apartment buildings
1938	Fannie Mae	To buy or hold loans from banks during credit shortages, selling loans back in gluts
1938	FHA authorized to insure 25 year loans with 10 percent downpayments	To expand homeownership opportunities
1944	GI Bill: VA mortgage insurance	To provide zero downpayment loans; perceived as low-cost benefit for veterans
1949	Rural Housing Administration (RHS)	To support farmers and residents of agricultural areas with mortgage insurance and subsidized mortgage interest rates
1951	Capital gains from sale of home allowed to be rolled-over to another home	To encourage home sales in reaction to tight housing markets after veterans returned from World War II
1954	Fannie Mae rechartered	To provide special assistance (subsidy) to construction and home purchase loans
1964	Capital gains in home sales allowed to be excluded (onetime) from taxation for seniors	To prevent seniors from being trapped in higher-cost, larger-size homes

Figure 1, Homeownership Policies (Carliner, 1998, pg. 299-321)

Table 4.1.—cont.

Year	Policy	Original Basis of Legislation
1966	FHA Section 221(h) subsidized loans	A pilot to experiment with directly subsidized home mortgages for minority families in the face of discriminatory “redlining” practices
1968	FHA Section 235 subsidized loans	To directly subsidize home mortgages for lower-income families (terminated in 1987)
1968	Fannie Mae becomes private “sponsored enterprise”; Ginnie Mae takes over Fannie Mae special-assistance function	To pump financing into mortgages and residential construction due to high interest rates in the mid-1960s and perceived demand from Baby Boomers seeking new homes
1970	Freddie Mac created	To purchase single and multifamily mortgages from the Federal Home Loan Bank system in response to credit shortage in late 1960s
1975	Home Mortgage Disclosure Act	To address “redlining” of low-income and minority areas by lenders
1977	Community Reinvestment Act	To push lenders to balance deposits with lending in underserved communities
1980	Limitations on Mortgage Revenue Bonds to low and moderate-income borrowers	To address perceived tax-free windfall as state and local governments issued growing numbers of tax-exempt bonds
1984	Mortgage Credit Certificates	To address concerns over the fees collected by mortgage revenue bond underwriters
1986	Tax Reform Act retained mortgage interest deduction but eliminated all other interest deductions	The mortgage industry reversed a Reagan administration proposal to eliminate all interest deductions; the mortgage interest was the only interest deduction retained
1990	HOME Program	Specifically called out homeownership as a goal
1996	SHOP (Self Help Ownership Program)	To purchase land and fund infrastructure for sweat equity homebuilding programs
1997	Taxpayer Relief Act excludes all capital gains on home sales up to \$500,000	To address perceived incentives for urban property owners to buy more expensive suburban homes

Source: courtesy of Carliner, 1998.

Figure 2, Homeownership Policies (Carliner, 1998, 299-321)

The “Problem” with the Current Model of the American Dream

As a result of these legislations, homeownership has been ever increasing over time despite a few periods of decrease. This is true for all different races and age groups (Rohe & Watson, 2007). Despite the promotion of the American Dream throughout our culture, our country faces many problems dealing with housing and our cities such as social isolation, the housing market crash, and suburban sprawl. Due to a variety of problems, the current version of the American Dream that is being promoted is not socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable.

Redefining the Dream believes the benefits and freedoms of the American Dream are possible beyond the traditional ownership of the typical single-family style American Dream homes that are being promoted. The American Dream can be offered through various types of ownership and structural types that can satisfy Americans’ housing needs and wants without eradicating the American Dream.

Social Problems

Much of today’s model of the American Dream has been possible because of the modern automobile and interstate highway system. The expansion of roads and availability of the automobile has allowed for development further from cities into the suburbs. New developments were often seen as an escape from packed and dirty cities that offered a better connection to nature. As mentioned earlier, government programs helped Americans, especially veterans, through mortgage loan access. However, access to

homeownership and a piece of the American Dream was not equal to all social, economic, ethnic, and racial groups. This has led to social isolation in neighborhoods and cities throughout the United States (Garvin, 2002).

One of the most direct forms of housing discrimination that led to social isolation is redlining. Community groups in Chicago coined the term redlining, “referring literally to red lines lenders and insurance providers admitted drawing around areas they would not serve” (Hillier, 2003, pg. 395). These redlined areas tended to be urban areas consisting of minorities, mostly African-Americans. By denying access to lending and insurance services, minorities were denied access to homeownership and were stuck in low-income areas with substandard housing. According to Dolores Hayden, the Home Owners Loan Corporation and Federal Housing Administration, “defined the appraised values of properties by making maps in various colors. They ‘red-lined’ or prohibited mortgage loans, in neighborhoods inhabited by people of color. Their highest classifications were reserved for all-white, all-Protestant neighborhoods and they refused loans in racially mixed neighborhoods. Only segregated subdivisions, enforced by deed restrictions, and sometimes separated by walls from neighborhoods where people of color resided, could qualify for FHA support” (Hayden, 2004, n.p.).

The Fair Housing Act, Equal Credit Opportunity Act, and Home Mortgage Discrimination Act ruled redlining and other forms of discrimination illegal (Hillier, 2003). Despite legislation prohibiting discriminatory lending and other economic practices, minorities in poor neighborhoods were denied access to

quality housing by lack of access to jobs, healthcare, neighborhood supermarkets, and other forms of informal discrimination. As many middle and upper class families were able to leave the city, inner-city neighborhoods were often left to decay. Community managers and developers would not invest in these neighborhoods, furthering decay and abandonment. Discriminatory practices and many indirect forms of discrimination have led to segregated living patterns that exist today (Immergluck, 2002).

In addition to discrimination against access to the American Dream, many people throughout American history have attempted access to the American Dream through homeownership without proper financial means. The endless promotion of the American Dream of homeownership has led many Americans to purchase a house with less than adequate means, leading to foreclosures and homelessness. In addition, “many others were led by emotional considerations and their desire for a home of their own to consciously go beyond their means in home buying” (Rohe & Watson, 2007, pg. 35-36). This was especially common during the Great Depression and post-Great Depression era when federal programs promoted homeownership. (Rohe & Watson, 2007)

Although it is almost impossible to break down case by case each person who has purchased a home, it is safe to say that many Americans have been “tricked” into buying a home they cannot afford. As seen by the various legislations relating to homeownership, the United States government has sought to remove obstacles to homeownership by lowering interest rates, decreasing down payment requirements, and loosening credit and job

requirements. Although these legislations have been mostly good intentioned, there have had unintended consequences. Instead of buying modest and affordable homes, many Americans have purchased homes at the top of their budgets. Many Americans have been under the false assumption that their home value will appreciate, when in reality they have depreciated (Rohe & Watson, 2007).

With the flight of people towards the suburbs along with the expansion of the interstate highway system, the design of neighborhoods changed significantly. Traditional American neighborhoods have typically been front-porch communities in neighborhoods with grid-style street patterns with local neighborhood businesses and convenience stores. These neighborhoods tended to have a much higher density and mixed-uses than today's typical suburban developments. White flight and the Interstate Highway system in the 1940's and beyond has allowed for suburbs with ranch style houses with small lawns. These new developments have caused American neighborhoods to transform from front yard to rear yard communities (Garvin, 2002).

Average Square Feet of New U.S. Single-Family Homes 1973-2010

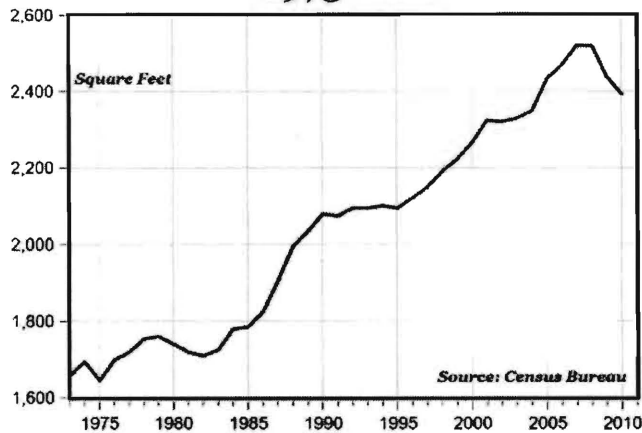


Figure 3, Home Sizes (Benfield, 2012)

the chart above, the average square footage since 1973 has increased drastically. In addition to just size, the design of suburban neighborhoods has drastically changed the way neighbors interact, if they interact at all. It has become too easy for Americans to drive their car into an attached garage and walk directly into their house without any interaction with neighbors. Many communities have lost their social aspect due to poor design that does not promote interacting with neighbors.

Economic Problems

Many social problems of the American Dream are tied directly to economic policies and problems. The economic policies and practices that have allowed for the American Dream are the same policies that have also allowed or supported social isolation and discrimination. In addition to the various policies and programs already listed, the tax structure in the United States supports homeownership by excluding rent people receive on their homes as exempt

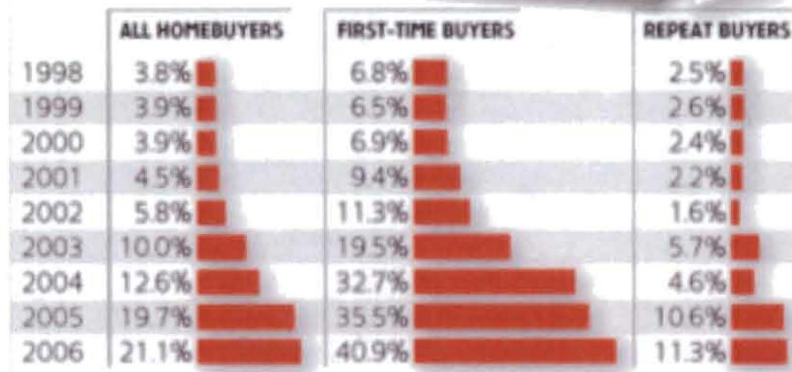
Living in a poorly designed suburban development promotes social isolation from neighbors. As people moved further from the urban core, they could have larger yards and larger homes. Developers began creating larger and larger homes, leading to today's "McMansions." As seen in

from taxation and, “by excluding imputed rent from homeownership from the tax base, the tax system in effect subsidizes owner-occupied housing” (Rosen & Gayer, 2010, pg. 432). This policy also increases demand for owner-occupied housing. Rosen also notes that despite evidence that homeowners are more likely than renters to take care of their properties, the benefits of homeownership are not large enough to justify the subsidy (Rosen & Gayer, 2010). This implies a strong support of homeownership throughout United States policy, which may also provide incentives for families to take risky mortgages. (Rosen & Gayer, 2010)

Policies and ideologies have also lead Americans to make poor economic housing decisions by leading them to buy homes they cannot afford. This is especially true for homeownership, but also applies to renting and other forms of ownership such as timeshares. The “bigger is better” mentality has lead Americans to seek homes they cannot afford or caused them to not adequately analyze the financial risks of their homes. In just the past few years, Americans have also been able to purchase a home with a much smaller down payment, as home prices have skyrocketed. In addition to taking riskier mortgages, down payments have decreased drastically, requiring little to no collateral for homebuyers, as seen in the graphic on the next page.

The dwindling down payment

Fewer homebuyers are making down payments as home prices have soared and the mortgage industry increasingly loans the full purchase price. Percentages of those buying homes in California without making down payments:



Source: California Association of Realtors

Sacramento Bee/Nam Nguyen

Figure 2, Down Payments (Broeders, 2007, n.p.)

Many economic housing problems in the United States are due to ideologies of the American Dream that have caused people to make poor financial decisions. Policies and ideologies have also allowed lenders to offer risky mortgage practices as well as speculation and fraud. These risky mortgages are known as subprime mortgages. According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, subprime loans are for people with flawed or limited credit histories. Subprime loans usually carry higher interest rates than prime loans to compensate for increased risk ("Subprime Lending," 2012, n.p.). In addition to higher rates of interest, subprime lenders also use tricky marketing and are more likely to have the words *consumer*, *finance*, and *acceptance* in their names. Some studies suggest there is an increased amount of subprime lenders in minority African-American and Hispanic neighborhoods than in

Caucasian neighborhoods, leading to an unequal racial burden known as reverse redlining (“Subprime Lending,” 2012).

Subprime lenders often determine someone as qualifying to afford a property when that person may be extending herself or himself well beyond what she or he can afford. Subprime loans also come with questionable terms and often a borrower’s entire monthly payment goes towards interest payments and not the principal amount of the loan. Another common practice is negative amortization, which occurs when a mortgage payment does not fully cover the interest that is accruing on the mortgage. According to Mortgage101.com, a person dealing with negative amortization pays for a very small mortgage payment that does not pay even for the interest that is accruing and the interest is added on the balance of the principal (“The Dangers of...” 2011, n.p.). This wave of new subprime mortgages since 1997 can be seen below. This wave of new tricky lending practices has caused a wave on new foreclosures throughout the country.

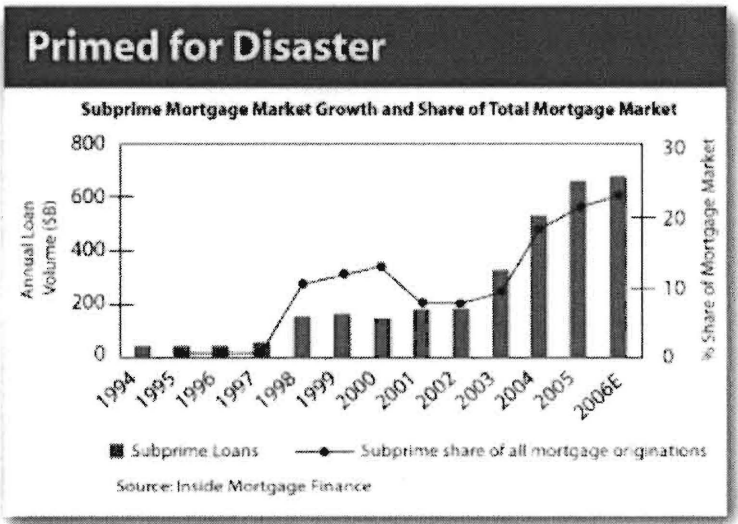


Figure 3 (“The Dangers of...” 2011, n.p.)

According to Kristopher Gerardi and Paul Willen, the subprime mortgage crisis has hit minority urban neighborhoods the hardest from their

studies in Massachusetts, without increasing the amount of homeownership by minorities. It created instability by leading to turnovers in properties and foreclosures. They conclude there is “significant evidence pointing to a selection effect... that borrowers who use subprime mortgage market have characteristics that have been shown to induce higher rates of default. In other words, these borrowers are more likely to default because they have a history of delinquency” (Gerardi & Willen, 2008, pg. 7). These borrowers also have fewer alternative options to foreclosure like refinancing or selling, especially if their home price declines (Gerardi & Willen, 2008).

Foreclosure leads to many negative consequences beyond economic hardship for the person or family who is foreclosed on. When a neighborhood is faced with high foreclosure rates, the whole neighborhood is negatively affected economically, socially, and physically. High rates of foreclosure can lead to lower housing values, increased crime, displacement, and family struggles. As the number of foreclosures increases, the effects of abandonment and blight increase. With the recent housing bubble crash, the increase in foreclosures has lead to blight in neighborhoods throughout the United States. Not only is the housing in some neighborhood decaying, but municipalities are facing problems with the aging infrastructure that has supported sprawl and lack of funds to support this infrastructure (Rohe & Watson, 2007).

Current homeowners are facing economic problems as well. Currently, approximately 25% of all mortgages today are underwater, meaning the mortgage loan has a higher balance than the free-market value of a home

(Campbell, 2012). This can prevent homeowners from refinancing as well as selling their home, and may lead to foreclosure. Many Americans are facing problems selling their homes if they need to move for their job or another reason, or are taking huge losses when selling. This can often make a home an impediment for employment and other life changes (Campbell, 2012).

Environmental Problems

The American Dream of owning a single-family house has created many environmental problems. Many environmental problems created are a result of suburban sprawl and the amount of land consumed by typical development. Multifamily and higher-density housing naturally takes up less land than typical suburban single-family housing seen throughout the United States. Increased sprawl has led to the development of existing natural land and farmland (Marsh, 2010).

The increase of sprawl from development has led to a decline in farmland as well as natural lands that serve important functions for native habitats and our food system. These natural habitats range from wetlands to forests, as well as countless ecosystems. The exact impact on ecosystems and their inhabitants is immeasurable but definite. According to the report *Endangered by Sprawl*, “Rapid consumption of land could threaten the survival of nearly one out of every three imperiled species in the U.S. Runaway development threatens the very survival of these national treasures and underscores the urgency for comprehensive habitat protection. The expanding footprint of development will put additional pressure on diminishing wildlife

resources' ("Endangered by Sprawl..." 2005, pg.vi-vii). In other words, the mass consumption of land in the United States has led to species endangerment and extinction partially due to the American Dream and sprawl development.

Increased sprawl development also leads to various water and soil problems. According to William Marsh, typical developments with residential lots of one to three acres tend to be the most damaging to water quality (Marsh, 2010). Residential development typical of the American Dream creates large lawns with long driveways and an increase in car reliance. This leads to increased pollution from cars, fertilizers, household products, and other sources. Clearing land for increased development contributes to greater runoff. It also gives a false sense of security and leads to flooding and runoff problems (Marsh, 2010). In addition, low density development naturally requires more energy and, "higher density buildings are inherently more environmentally friendly, using less energy for heating and cooling than stand-alone buildings" (Leinberger, 2008, pg.10).

Suburban development creates an increased need for automobile use, roads, and infrastructure. Increased automobile use leads to increased stormwater pollution with outward expansion. Increased pavement on roads, parking, driveways, alleys, and other surfaces leads to contamination from various substances such as oil, salt, paint, carbon dioxide, and petroleum residue. These harmful substances end up in water, air, and throughout the environment and have a variety of negative effects on human health. Current development practices of "new drivable suburban housing subdivisions, strip

retail, and office parks lead to more traffic, increased pollution, and less open space” (Leinberger, 2008). In addition, “family living in a large-lot single-family home uses about two-thirds more energy than that of a family living in a more compact, high-density environment” (Leinberger, 2008, pg. 75).

An increase in automobile reliance has also increased dependence on foreign oil and other resources, creating various international relation and national security concerns. Current foreign policy is driven by the need for oil to power cars (Leinberger, 2008). Cars create carbon dioxide emissions that lead to health risks and contribute to climate change and global warming. A Harvard School of Public Health report notes that, “congestion in the USA’s 83 largest urban areas last year [2010] lead to more than 2,200 premature deaths and a related public health cost of at least \$18 billion” (Copeland, 2011, n.p.). These premature deaths are mostly due to a variety of respiratory diseases, and do not include non-fatal health problems. In addition, urban sprawl and automobile reliance has been shown to have a correlation with obesity. The American Journal of Public Health notes that, “the current obesity epidemic has many causes, but there is an association between urban sprawl and obesity” (Lopez, 2003, pg. 1574).

A New Model for the American Dream

One of the main goals of *Redefining the Dream* is to expose many of the concerns and problems with the current model of the American Dream and expose people to a variety of housing options. Most of the social, economic, and environmental problems listed above are not exclusive of single-family

homeownership and are related to various housing structural and ownership types. However, most of these effects have been primarily driven by practices typically associated with the current American Dream. Our group simply wishes to expose people to these problems and offer educational resources relating to housing.

Many Americans are beginning to see the effects of the recent housing crisis themselves or around them, and are already changing perceptions. According to Dr. Campbell, in 2010 76% of adults deemed renting more favorable and only 12% of current renters plan to buy a home (Campbell, 2012).

He also notes that people should see home as a place to live, not as a financial asset to get you rich (Campbell, 2012). The media and individuals are starting to realize that bigger isn't always better and are working to make better housing-related decisions for themselves and the community. The recent housing crisis has brought up the question of whether homeownership should be the preferred tenure in the United States, or at least if it should be promoted as much. The *Redefining the Dream* Team, including myself, wish to promote better housing choices as well as better designed communities.

Despite the various problems with the current model of the American Dream, there can be many benefits of single-family homeownership. These include privacy, community, cost effectiveness, and many other benefits. As noted earlier, residential development has been moving away from community-friendly and cost-effective housing development (Rohe & Watson, 2007). Other forms of housing such as apartments can offer the same benefits

listed above better than single-family housing. *Redefining the Dream* wishes to promote that home is not always a house, and that these benefits can be provided by a variety of housing options. We also believe the social, environmental, and economic aspects of housing should work together to create sustainable communities. The American Dream should be attainable to any social or economic class and work in harmony with communities and individuals.

As demographics and perceptions are changing in the United States, so must our housing practices. As the Baby Boomers begin to dominate the housing market, they are looking for different housing options and towards living in cities. Many are downsizing and looking for housing closer to amenities that cities offer. According to a CBS News report, “roughly 47 percent of real estate professionals said that older Boomers are not interested in a single-family home, which may relate to the downsizing trend. Instead, this group is looking for condos or townhomes with less maintenance and upkeep requirements” (Glink, 2011, n.p.).

The trend of preferring to live in cities also applies to young people that “prefer driving less, are walking and biking more, and take public transit more frequently than older people do” (Laumer, 2012, n.p.). In order to fulfill these desires, more young people are looking to live in the city where they have more restaurants, music, entertainment, shopping, and other amenities that are rare in the suburbs. High gas prices, a desire to live within close proximity to jobs, increasing more environmental concern, social lifestyle preferences, technology, and many other reasons have changed the way young people consider where

and how they live (Laumer, 2012). This new trend can be seen in, “recent consumer research [that] shows that inhabitants of thirty to forty percent of households in the surveyed metropolitan areas want to live in walkable urban places, yet only five to twenty percent of housing supply would be considered walkable in most regions” (Leinberger, 2008, pg. 6).

The key to providing sustainable housing for all generations of Americans is through changing perceptions and housing options and promoting smart growth and development. According to *Endangered by Sprawl*, “Being smart about growth means revitalizing existing cities and suburbs and making efficient use of land, rather than building in outlying farm fields and forests. It means making cities and suburbs affordable places to live, so that everyone can participate in and benefit from this revitalization” (Ewing, 2005, pg.v). Smart growth and sustainable housing occurs naturally as people’s perceptions and preferences change the market. Innovation and better development practices are also leading the way for smarter housing practices. Smarter housing practices should be promoted for all people and promote diversity.

The Future of *Redefining the Dream*

Redefining the Dream seeks to help raise awareness, change perceptions, and offer educational resources. We are creating a website, documentary, and showcase with various educational resources. In order to achieve this we seek to promote various legitimate housing options and eliminate the negative connotations that come with various types of structures and tenure status. The American Dream in relation to housing must be evaluated beyond just changing

perceptions and offering educational resources. In addition to our efforts, making more sustainable housing and living environments requires planning and legislative work that seeks to provide incentives, use federal programs, expand historic preservation tax credits, rehab buildings, tame traffic, reduce crime, and create smart growth reforms (Breen & Rigby, 2004).

Redefining the Dream wishes to show that there is more to the American Dream than single-family home ownership. We hope that Americans will be able to choose which housing option best meets their individual wants, needs, and resources in order to fulfill their American Dream. The current version of the American Dream that is being promoted is not socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable due to a variety of problems. The American Dream can be offered through a variety of types of tenure and structural types that can satisfy Americans' housing needs and wants without eradicating the American Dream while being socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable.

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